

Research has shed light on the computer frustrations that plague older adults

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A number of evolving social changes highlight the importance of making computer technology accessible and usable for older adults. For instance, older adults are using email increasingly to keep up their social contact with others and are using the Internet to look up health information.

An innovative research study was conducted at the University of Alberta which analyzed the performance outcomes of older adults when being tested on the computer and Internet.

What researchers found can be applied as a 'best practice' when teaching older adults how to use computer technology. Research found that older adults feel less confident about their computer knowledge than younger adults. Older adults are also concerned about how memory issues may impact their performance.

"This lack of confidence is a major factor in older adults' ability to become proficient with computer technology, which unfortunately results in less computer use," said Dr. Patricia Boechler from the University of Alberta.

The study also highlights the obstacles older adults experience such as a significant decrease in sensory keenness, particularly with vision and hearing, as well as a decrease in motor skills due to health problems, such as arthritis and tremors.

Dr. Boechler notes, "Often a large challenge for older adults when using

the computer is navigating the mouse and keyboard, which is commonly due to a health problem like arthritis."

Boechler, Foth, and Watchorn studied approximately 40 older adults by having them complete computer exercises and measured their results to undergraduates who previously completed the exercises. The study gives a list of recommendations to help even the playing field for older adults such as increasing font sizes to accommodate vision problems, ensuring that verbal instructions are delivered at an appropriate volume with minimal noise distractions and giving demonstrations of the tasks ahead of time to reduce anxiety.

Source: University of Alberta

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